



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

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### Laws of Minnesota 2019 Accomplishment Plan

#### General Information

**Date:** 07/30/2021

**Project Title:** RIM Grassland Reserve

**Funds Recommended:** \$2,276,000

**Legislative Citation:** ML 2019, 1st Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(g)

**Appropriation Language:** \$2,276,000 the first year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance grassland habitat under Minnesota Statutes, section 103F.501 to 103F.531. Of this amount, up to \$39,000 is for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

#### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** John Voz

**Title:** RIM Easement and Working Lands Specialist

**Organization:** BWSR

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#### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Otter Tail, Mahnomen, Cottonwood and Becker.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

**Activity types:**

- Protect in Easement

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

- Prairie

## **Narrative**

### **Abstract**

Using the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program, this project will address the potential loss of grassland habitats from conversion to cropland and accelerate grassland protection efforts not covered by other programs. Working in coordination with established Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), this proposal will enroll 500 RIM acres (approximately 6 easements), focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan-identified landscapes.

### **Design and Scope of Work**

In 2018 alone over 200,000 acres of CRP will expire in Minnesota. Over the next three years 347,000 additional acres will expire - in geographical terms, 15 townships or 542.47 square miles. Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of prairie. Today less than two percent remains. The few acres of native remnant prairie that remain were once thought of as too rocky or wet for row crops but not anymore. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland wildlife populations, including pollinator species.

This proposal, working in partnership with Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), focuses on protecting current grasslands and buffering native prairie that are within wildlife habitat complexes not covered by other conservation programs. There are programs for native prairie such as NPB and NTGP NWR and programs for cropland, but there are no programs for 'in between' grasslands. As Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and LTTs review these areas for possible enrollment, they may find additional tracts that are native prairie. With this project, some native prairie may be included to square up parcels. In cases where larger tracts are identified, they will contact the DNR's Biological Survey and Native Prairie Bank staff for a more formal botanical survey of the site.

The loss of native prairie and grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing northwest, western and southern Minnesota. This appropriation aims to protect 500 acres of prairie and grassland habitat by coordinating and accelerating the enrollment of Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) through private land easements. This level of acceleration is needed to address today's rapid loss of grassland habitat and meet the goals set forth in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

### **How does the plan address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species?**

Minnesota grasslands provide important habitat for a wide range of species of greatest conservation need. Consistent with guidance in The Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan and Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, strategic site selection will be conducted as well as efforts to minimize landscape stressors and plan for plant diversity and long-term resiliency of project sites. More than 150 Species of Greatest Conservation Need use grasslands for breeding, migration, and/or foraging.

Species that will be targeted include: Greater prairie chicken, Eastern meadowlark, Western meadowlark, Grasshopper sparrow, Northern pintail, Northern black duck, Burrowing owl, Chestnut collared longspur,

Bobolink, Wilson's phalarope, Sedge wren, Plains hog-nosed snake, American badger, Prairie vole, Plains pocket mouse, Eastern spotted skunk, Dakota skipper, Monarch butterfly, Power sheik skipper, Regal fritillary, Rusty patched bumble bee.

### **Describe how the plan uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:**

Native prairies are often part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and wetlands. These complexes will be the top priority for this project using the MN Prairie Plan framework. A preference will be given to protecting expiring CRP with enrollment of adjacent remnant prairie as identified in the MN County Biological Survey. This focus on expiring CRP will fill a niche that cannot otherwise be filled by the Native Prairie Bank program. LTT's will help guide restoration strategies such as prescribed burning, conservation grazing and woody tree removal to be used to restore the conditions of moderate quality prairies. In addition, the LTTs will identify remnant prairie sites that are not listed on the MN County Biological Survey and update the survey accordingly. By utilizing the LTT's, parcels will be targeted for protection and resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.

Recent genetic diversity research was conducted on Greater Prairie Chickens by the MNDNR to help us understand how birds move through the landscape using a new approach called landscape genetics. It found that prairie chickens in the northern part of the sampled area, near Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, are not very connected to prairie chickens in Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties to the south. Connecting these areas with high quality habitat would allow more genetic mixing, potentially reduce stress and mortality and eliminate the need for birds to travel long distances to find suitable habitat. This "follow the chicken" approach has worked remarkably well in identifying, targeting and protecting areas that have positive impacts on a wide range of species of greatest conservation need.

### **Which two sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are most applicable to this project?**

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

### **Which two other plans are addressed in this program?**

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

### **Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?**

#### **Forest / Prairie Transition**

- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

#### **Prairie**

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

### **Does this program include leveraged funding?**

-

**Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.**

This funding request is not supplanting existing funding or a substitution for any previous funding.

**How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?**

Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement into perpetuity. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and partners' staff document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at \$6,500 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship cover costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

**Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2019-Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Inspections first 5 years; then every 3rd year	Corrective actions on any violations	Enforcement action taken by MN Attorney General office
2019-Ongoing	Landowner Responsibility	Maintain compliance with easement terms	-	-

**Activity Details**

**Requirements**

**If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?**

Yes

**Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection?**

Yes

**Who will manage the easement?**

BWSR will be the responsible party for monitoring and enforcing easements.

**Who will be the easement holder?**

BWSR will be the easement holder.

**What is the anticipated number of easements (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?**

Approximately 6 easements are planned to be acquired.

**Land Use**

**Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program?**

Yes

**Explain what will be planted:**

In certain circumstances food plots for wildlife are an allowable use on RIM easements and must be part of an approved Conservation Plan. Under this proposal no food plots would be allowed on remnant prairies which have never been cultivated (only areas that buffer remnant prairies). Food plots on narrow buffers, steep slopes and wet areas are not allowed but may be offered on any potential surrounding grass buffer on prior cultivated lands. RIM policy limits food plots to 10% of the total easement area or 5 acres whichever is smaller. There is no cost share for establishment of food plots and upon termination and/or abandonment the landowners must reestablish the vegetation as prescribed in the Conservation Plan at their own expense. Food plots are a rarely selected option by landowners, to date only 2.2% of RIM easements have food plots.

**Are any of the crop types planted GMO treated?**

False

**Will the eased land be open for public use?**

No

**Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?**

Yes

**Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:**

Though uncommon, there could be a potential for new minimal use trails, if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (e.g. firebreaks, berm maintenance, etc). Unauthorized trails identified during the monitoring process are in violation of the easement.

**Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?**

Yes

**How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?**

The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program that has over 6,500 easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first 5 years and then every 3rd year after that. BWSR, in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

**Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?**

Yes

**Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:**

Though uncommon, there could be a potential for new minimal use trails, if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (e.g. firebreaks, berm maintenance, etc). Unauthorized trails identified during the monitoring process are in violation of the easement.

**How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?**

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with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

**Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?**

Yes

Vegetative restoration is planned to occur and these restoration costs are included within the Easement Acquisition amount.

**Timeline**

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Enrollment of 500 acres of Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) private land easements	June 30, 2024
Final Report Submitted	November 1, 2024

**Date of Final Report Submission:** 11/01/2024

## Budget

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan.

### Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$163,800	-	-	\$163,800
Contracts	\$12,600	-	-	\$12,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,034,800	-	-	\$2,034,800
Easement Stewardship	\$39,000	-	-	\$39,000
Travel	\$4,000	-	-	\$4,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$14,400	-	-	\$14,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,700	-	-	\$5,700
Supplies/Materials	\$1,700	-	-	\$1,700
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$2,276,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$2,276,000</b>

### Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.25	5.0	\$137,500	-	-	\$137,500
Easement Processing	0.08	3.0	\$16,200	-	-	\$16,200
Engineering/Eco Services	0.03	3.0	\$10,100	-	-	\$10,100

**Amount of Request:** \$2,276,000

**Amount of Leverage:** -

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 0.0%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$178,200

**As a % of the total request:** 7.83%

**Easement Stewardship:** \$39,000

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 1.92%

### How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

A reduction in funding has reduced outputs proportionally. Program management costs are the exception, due to program management

& oversight remaining consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

## Contracts

### **What is included in the contracts line?**

The contract line amount will be used for payments to SWCD staff for easement implementation.

## Easement Stewardship

### **What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?**

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at \$6,500 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship cover costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

## Travel

### **Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?**

No

### **Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging**

The travel line will typically be used for traditional travel costs with the addition of vehicle lease costs that are directly attributable to work completed with this appropriation. It is estimated that lease costs may amount to approximately 40% of travel costs for this appropriation.

### **I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:**

No

## Direct Support Services

### **How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?**

BWSR calculates direct support services costs that are directly related to and necessary for each request based on the type of work being done.

## Federal Funds

### **Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?**

No



## Output Tables

### Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	500	0	0	500
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>500</b>

### Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$2,276,000	-	-	\$2,276,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$2,276,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$2,276,000</b>

### Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	100	0	400	0	500
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>500</b>

### Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$455,200	-	\$1,820,800	-	\$2,276,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$455,200</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$1,820,800</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$2,276,000</b>

### Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$4,552	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

### Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State	-	-	-	-	-

PILT Liability					
Protect in Easement	-	\$4,552	-	\$4,552	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

## Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

## Outcomes

### Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ *A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and nongame species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

### Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and nongame species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

## Parcels

*For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.*

## Parcel Information

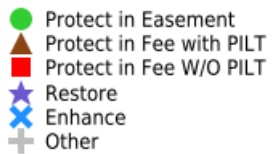
### Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes](#)

**Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:**

## Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
03-02-20-14- -	Becker	14241231	117	\$215,700	No
03-01-20-14- -	Becker	14141205	41	\$68,500	No
17-01-20-14- -	Cottonwood	10536221	71	\$337,100	No
17-03-20-14- -	Cottonwood	10536209	42	\$192,400	No
17-04-20-14- -	Cottonwood	10738211	41	\$193,200	No
44-01-19-14- -	Mahnomen	14341231	80	\$127,400	No
56-01-20-14-W-	Otter Tail	13243221	227	\$760,900	No



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